



THE HIGH COMMISSIONER'S DIALOGUE
7-8 December 2022

Refugee Statement on Development for the 2022 High Commissioner's Dialogue

This statement was drafted through ongoing consultations with a wide variety of refugee¹ actors globally and attempts to reflect the diversity of our views.

Currently, we are facing the highest number of protracted displacement situations since the end of the Cold War—according to [the World Bank](#), around 76% of refugees are displaced for more than five years. This reality means that forced displacement is much more a development issue than a humanitarian one. Protracted situations need sustainable solutions, not stop-gap ones. Many people experiencing displacement live in the Global South/Majority World. Host countries often need development support to integrate displaced people and allow them to contribute to the host economy. Those who have or are currently experiencing displacement can identify their needs and solutions to them. **We therefore identify five main areas of focus for UNHCR, host governments, INGOs, and other stakeholders to prioritize over the coming year.**

First, and underlying all other priorities, refugees must play a leadership role in every level of development programming, both at the strategic level and during implementation. Hiring people with lived experience of forced displacement and compensating them fairly must be a major focus of all actors working in this space. Another best practice to increase the agency of refugees in decision-making processes about them is to establish a platform for dialogue between local governments, regional UNHCR offices, and refugee leaders, as refugee-led organizations in the Kakuma Refugee Camps in Kenya are calling for. This way, refugees can lead in the strategic planning of any development effort in their environment and be involved as partners when the program is implemented. Similarly, regional bodies and national governments should implement refugee-led advisory boards, as Canada, the US, and other countries have recently begun to implement at the country level and organizations like Coalición por Venezuela are working towards on the Quito Process at the regional level. This coordination would encourage and support active political participation of refugees in the democratic processes of their host country, allowing them to further integrate and invest in their new community.

Refugees play a crucial role in identifying gaps and needs in development. For example, refugees in Sudan are advocating for the acceptance of the resettlement of South Sudanese refugees in Sudan, so they are able work. Another gap identified by refugees is that development efforts must include sustainable food solution for refugees. For example, in Uganda, refugees are struggling due to the reductions of food rations by UNHCR, forcing many to return to the food-insecure countries that they

¹ A refugee is understood as a person who has been forcibly displaced from their home country, regardless of obtaining any legal status. Refugee-led organizations/initiatives are organizations which are founded and/or led by those with lived refugee experience, and may include both formal, registered organizations and informal initiatives.

left. With no farmland for refugees to produce their own food, this food reduction is putting children at risk of starvation, dropping out of school, child marriage, and early pregnancy. When put in leadership roles, refugees could spearhead efforts as local as providing financial and coordination support refugee community centers in Angola to initiatives as broad as encouraging support for self-determination, diversity, and inclusion of refugees in education, employment, and recreation.

Another best practice is soliciting the advice of refugees on any development research conducted about them, as the World Bank did for its 2023 [Development Report on Migrants, Refugees, and Societies](#). In this case, the World Bank shared its report findings with refugees and asked for their feedback, to make sure refugees' perspectives were included in the final version of the report. To replicate this best practice, large international organizations working on development in a displacement context should also prioritize hiring people with lived experience of forced displacement and compensating them fully for contributions to this work.

Second, development actors should focus on creating standardized documentation for refugees and other persons in need of international protection, with a focus on digital documentation. This is a common, and solvable, barrier for refugees around the world, and especially those in the Latin American and African contexts. Currently, one billion people around the world have no passport or formal identification, even though both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) establish that everyone has a right to recognition as a person before the law. Without documentation, refugees struggle to access work opportunities, move freely, and access education and health systems. This is especially an issue for Venezuelans, who often cannot afford renewing or obtaining a passport abroad, due to prohibitive costs, the absence of consular representations in many countries, and/or long delays in the delivery of documents. In addition, children of Venezuelan parents who are born where there is no jus soli (right to nationality in the country of birth) struggle to visit the Venezuelan consulate to register the birth of their child, leaving the children de facto stateless. One way to address this issue is to enable identification documents to be accessed digitally. Specifically, the international community must call on the United Nations Task Force on Digital Identity to work with the forcibly displaced community to address this issue. At the same time, these efforts must take into consideration differences in accessibility to digital platforms and must be vetted to avoid privacy and security risks. Without documentation, it is impossible for refugees to integrate into their host communities and contribute to them.

Third, resourcing refugee-led initiatives must be a priority for development. Since refugees often face such difficulty receiving documentation and registering their organizations, development actors should increase access to flexible and multi-year funding for refugees. Despite [research showing](#) that refugee-led organizations (RLOs) fill gaps not met by international service providers, are accessible and embedded within their communities, and provide refugees with both short and long-term solutions, RLOs are often severely underfunded. And, even though large gains have been made in recent years to provide access to flexible funding and localize funding, the proportion of direct funding to local actors halved from 4% in 2020 to 2% in 2021, according to the Grand Bargain Independent Assessment. International funders, including states, large INGOs, and UNHCR, must increase the amount of funding to local and refugee-led organizations and prioritize flexible and multi-year funding mechanisms that make resources available to refugees.

Fourth, all development efforts must consider the needs of particularly vulnerable groups experiencing forced displacement, including (but not limited to) women, children, people with disabilities, and the LGBTQI+ community. For example, displaced women often have much more difficulty than displaced men in finding employment, and they often struggle to access education and healthcare. In [a World Bank study](#) on internal displacement in Ethiopia, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan, and South Sudan, employment rates were at least 90% higher for displaced men than displaced women. In situations of cross-border displacement, where refugees often face greater barriers for employment, the situation is even more difficult for women. Additionally, LGBTQI+ refugees, especially those whose names and gender in documents do not match their identification, find it impossible to secure employment and are subject to further harms. Another example is in Uganda, where a lack of food for HIV positive mothers whose lactating puts their children at risk of getting HIV. To tailor their response to the specific needs of the people they are trying to help, development actors must ensure an Age, Gender, and Diversity Mainstreaming (AGDM) approach to refugee inclusion. Specifically, this means that decision-making bodies integrate age, gender and diversity considerations into all actions around development policy in a displacement context. To achieve these objectives, international actors must meaningfully include the perspective of organizations that work closely on these issues: RLOs working at the local level, organizations/institutions led by women, and faith-based organizations, among others.

Finally, the international community must place a greater focus on resettlement as a “durable solution” to forced displacement. UNHCR promotes three “durable solutions” to forced displacement: voluntary repatriation, local integration, and resettlement. Nevertheless, the High Commissioner’s Dialogue only focuses on voluntary return and local integration. This places most responsibility on the Global South/Majority World instead of creating genuine responsibility-sharing across the globe. Furthermore, resettlement efforts should not discriminate based on country of origin. For example, refugee leaders in Uganda have consistently seen asylum-seekers from Rwanda denied international protection due solely to the fact that they are from Rwanda, while asylum-seekers from the DRC have found it easier to be granted refugee status.

Over the next year, all actors working in development spaces must commit to ensuring (i) refugees are included as partners in all levels of decision-making and implementation of development efforts across geographical contexts; (ii) standardized documentation for refugees is established; (iii) increased and more flexible funding for refugee-led organizations working in development; (iv) development efforts accurately address the needs of particularly vulnerable groups, including women, children, people with disabilities, and the LGBTQI+ community; and (v) a greater international focus on resettlement as a “durable solution”.

We urge the international community to ensure these recommendations are implemented in accordance with goal 6 of the Grand Bargain, to support a “Participation Revolution,” in order to increase accountability to affected populations around the world.

To conclude, we would like to express our appreciation for the service of development actors to those who, like us, were forced to flee, and we affirm our commitment to collaborative engagement.